

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

Dr Albert Dresler (1904-1963)

Lighting Engineer, Physicist, Scientist and Educator

- Birth & Family:** Albert Dresler was born on the thirty first of March 1904 in Surbiton, England. He was the son of a German wine and spirits merchant. Following the outbreak of World War One, the family were interned in England before being returned to Germany. After World War One the family moved back to Surbiton in 1922 but this was only for a brief time. On the 29th of March 1934, after a 7 year courtship, he married Bertha Klara Antoine (known as Eva) and in 1938 his daughter Evelyne was born.
- Qualifications:** Diploma of Engineering, Berlin Technical University (Technische Hochschule) 1922-1928.
- Doctorate (1930) – studying the design, review and disposition of room lighting and average brightness. Also invented a colour-corrected photocell (the Dresler Principle).
- Memberships:** Secretary of the German National Committee on Illumination.
- Member of the Physics Society
- Member of the Australian National Committee on Illumination (ANCI), becoming its Chairman in 1955.
- Member of the Victorian Illuminating Engineering Society
- Work History:** In 1933 Dresler accepted a position at the Osram lighting factory in Berlin, in charge of the Photometric Measurement Laboratory. While at Osram, Dresler came under the influence of Dr Meyer, who was the Chairman of the German National Committee on Illumination (NIC) which was affiliated to the Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage (CIE) in which Dresler became Secretary to the German National Committee
- During his time at Osram (1933-1942) Dresler repeatedly published works in the Osram research journal and elsewhere. He managed to avoid national service, either because of a heart condition or because his work was of national importance. At this time, developments leading to the fluorescent light were being made in Germany, Britain and the United States, and it is possible that Dresler contributed to the German developments.
- At the conclusion of World War Two, the Russians began destroying factories and shipping useful equipment back to Russia. Dresler was captured by Russian Cossacks but was returned to his family three days later. By 1945 the Osram factory was located in the British zone of Berlin and there was a desperate attempt to rehabilitate the factory so that light globes could once more be produced. Dresler was cleared of any association with the Nazis and was employed by the British to return the factory to working order.
- Because of the high regard in which Dresler was held by the British, he was one of only three Germans given permission to attend the first post-

war CIE quadrennial session in Paris in 1948. He also helped to re-establish the teaching of lighting at the Institut für Lichttechnische in the Technische Hochschule in Berlin.

In 1947 Dresler applied to migrate to Australia as a scientist/engineer. He chose Australia because it was so far from Europe and he wished his daughter to grow up in a free society. He arrived in Sydney on the 17th of July 1949 to take up the position of Lighting Engineer with the Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS) in Melbourne, advising on the effective use of natural lighting in factories and workplaces.

On the day following his arrival in Australia, he was interviewed by the Sydney Technical College regarding lighting education. He offered the college, and later RMIT, his own notes to be used in the teaching of lighting. He was also soon in demand as a lecturer on lighting subjects, teaching a course at RMIT and a correspondence course for the Illuminating Engineering Society of Victoria.

In October 1949, at the insistence of the Sydney DLNS, Dresler returned from Melbourne to assist with lighting industry problems in Sydney and Newcastle. He was soon providing advice in measurement methods and instrumentation, standards, and manufacturing methods to bodies as diverse as the National Standards Measurement Laboratory, the Standards Association Committees on Interior Lighting, the Department of Main Roads, and the Electric Lamp Manufacturers Association.

In 1955 he became Chairman of the NCI, and was the only Australian to attend the quadrennial meeting of the International Lighting Commission (CIE). In 1959 he again attended, this time with Dr Bill Blevin who was later to become chief of the National Standards Measurement Laboratory.

Dresler's leadership and guidance resulted in Australia becoming highly respected in the International Lighting Commission. His work was the basis of Australian design methods for day lighting, and was adopted as the international standard for the calculation of natural daylight.

Dresler died of a heart attack on the seventeenth of July 1963.

Although he was only in Australia for a relatively brief period of time, he made an enormous contribution to establishing Australia on the international lighting scene.

Prepared by Patricia Taaffe, April 2003, from an oral history interview with Derrick Kendrick conducted by Michael Clarke on 26.10.98.